United Nations A/C.4/63/SR.19

General Assembly
Sixty-third session

Official Records

Distr.: General
5 December 2008

Original: English

Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

Summary record of the 19th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 29 October 2008, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Argüello ..... (Argentina)
later: Mr. Cujba (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Republic of Moldova)
later: Mr. Argüello (Chairman) ..... (Argentina)

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08-57452 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 29: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
(A/63/13, A/63/269, A/63/315, A/63/317 and A/63/375)

1. **Ms. Koning AbuZayd** (Commissioner-General, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)), introducing the report for 2007 (A/63/13), noted that it gave particular attention to the twin crises in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and in northern Lebanon that had seriously affected the Palestine refugees and, with them, UNRWA. The report described the substantial changes taking place both within the Agency and in its relationships with its stakeholders, aimed at improving its effectiveness as the largest provider of basic services to the Palestine refugees and integrating it more into the United Nations system.

2. Her Agency had faced many challenges over the decades, but no emergency had persisted as long as the current conflict in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, now in its ninth year. The humanitarian crises that had beset Gaza and the West Bank in the past two years had dwarfed earlier calamities. Moreover, UNRWA had never had to cope with major crises in three fields of operation simultaneously, the third being Lebanon. The Nahr al-Barid refugee camp in Lebanon had been completely destroyed in weeks of fierce fighting, displacing a once-thriving refugee community of some 30,000 people that would need to be supported elsewhere for the next three years until the camp was rebuilt.

3. The intricate system of closure and other movement restrictions imposed by Israel on Gaza and the West Bank, with the aim of improving security for its own people, had had a devastating economic and human cost. According to the World Bank, had there not been restrictions and other punitive measures that had choked the economy of the occupied Territories, the Palestinian economy would probably have doubled in size between 2000 and 2007. Conditions were particularly wrenching in Gaza, where the Israeli blockade imposed following the takeover by Hamas in 2007 had severed access to the outside world, including access to medical care, higher education and numerous aspects of economic life. Ninety per cent of Gaza's small businesses had shut down in the past year and the unemployment rate, at close to 50 per cent, was among the highest in the world. The Israeli policy was beginning to scar indelibly Gaza's children, who made up over half of the population of 1.5 million.

4. Through its extensive emergency programmes, UNRWA was shouldering the major burden of providing humanitarian assistance in the Occupied Palestinian Territory: food aid to the destitute and to school children, short-term jobs for the jobless, mobile primary health-care clinics and much more, including a summer games programme for children that had provided a much-valued alternative at a time of deepening social conservatism and radicalization in Gaza. The Agency had improved the effectiveness of its emergency service delivery, in collaboration with the World Food Programme (WFP), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

5. The UNRWA emergency appeals had been relatively well-funded, although in 2007 only 57 per cent of the pledged amount had been received. While there had been a strong donor response to the appeals for the Nahr al-Barid crisis in Lebanon, the interim support programmes for the displaced population would have to begin to be cut back, unless new pledges were received. Moreover, the response to the appeal for reconstruction of the camp had been disappointing, and threatened to jeopardize the future of that crucial project.

6. The Agency's core services, delivered directly by its staff through its own facilities, were the cornerstone of its mandate. Highlighting some of the Agency's achievements, starting with the education programme, she said that nearly 500,000 pupils were enrolled in UNRWA schools. Primary enrolment was almost universal and was gender-balanced. Enrolment rates exceeded the average in the Middle East. Almost 6,000 students were enrolled in nine technical and vocational training centres providing market-oriented skills. The health programme, accounting for about one third of the Agency's budget, offered 9 million patients primary health care with a focus on maternal and child health and disease prevention and control, and had achieved nearly universal immunization coverage. The relief and social services programme provided an essential safety net for the poorest refugees and their dependents and vital support for particularly vulnerable groups, in the form of food, cash and other long-term assistance for families, and also home repair and support to vibrant independent community-based organizations. That programme had in the past year shifted its focus

towards those living in abject or absolute poverty. In those three areas, significant strides had been made towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals, and the social and economic advancement of Palestine refugee women was one of the great unsung stories of the United Nations.

7. The fourth programme area, microfinance, introduced in 1991 in Gaza, had been expanded to the West Bank, Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic, stimulating local enterprise and generating income through 142,000 loans valued at $150 million. The overall rates of repayment had been high, but owing to the economic closure of the Gaza Strip, the programme's viability there was threatened. The Agency's fifth and newest department oversaw infrastructure and camp improvement projects, taking a participatory and community-driven approach to urban planning, shelter rehabilitation, environmental infrastructure and livelihood building, funded exclusively through extrabudgetary funds.

8. Concerned about the declining quality of some of its services and the inability to update some programme activities sufficiently, UNRWA was in the process of adopting a six-year medium-term strategy with effect from 2010, based solidly on field-level planning and results-based management practices, and requiring donor financing.

9. While contributions to UNRWA were no longer declining in real terms, the Agency's funding gap remained large. Rising food and energy costs in the past year had aggravated the problem. The findings in the report of the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA (A/63/375) merited careful reading. It would be short-sighted and self-defeating to have to cut aid to the Palestine refugees.

10. It was heartening to report that the organizational development undertaken to overhaul the Agency's managerial and programme capacity and structure was already transforming the management, planning and delivery of services as well as the human resource and information technology systems that helped drive the process. The reforms were improving the ability to monitor and evaluate operations and their impact, and to plan strategically. And the results were already being felt in innovative programming and other aspects of the new management culture. Donors had thus far covered about 80 per cent of the budget for organizational development.

11. UNRWA had been following closely the revival of the peace process. Settlement of the refugee question — one of the key final-status issues — must be a part of the package. If agreement was reached, the Agency stood ready to play whatever role it was given by Member States in managing transitional arrangements and handing over its responsibilities to the appropriate authorities. The next year would mark the sixtieth anniversary of the Agency's establishment. While that was not, in itself, a cause for celebration given the persistence of the refugee problem for that long — the record of UNRWA achievements did deserve recognition.

12. **Mr. Jolle** (Norway), speaking as Rapporteur of the Working Group on the Financing of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), introduced the report of the Working Group (A/63/375), which noted the significant shortfall in pledges for UNRWA in light of unanticipated cost increases, and the serious effects that shortfall would have on services offered. The Working Group urged Governments to meet their responsibility and fully fund the Agency's budget for the biennium, given that the Agency played a vital role in preserving stability and security in the region. It also called on donors to fully fund the Emergency Appeal, since 70 per cent of registered refugees in the Gaza Strip were currently dependent on UNRWA for essential sustenance. Finally, it called on all donors, particularly countries in the region, to support the project for the rebuilding of the Nahr al-Barid refugee camp in northern Lebanon.

13. *Mr. Cujba (Moldova), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

14. **Ms. Abdelhady-Nasser** (Observer for Palestine) said that 2008 was the sixtieth anniversary of Al-Nakba, which had led to the uprooting, displacement and dispossession of the Palestinian people. More than 50 per cent of the population continued to live in exile or in refugee camps, while the remainder had been under Israeli occupation for more than 40 years, suffering severe oppression and constant violation of their human rights. The 4.6 million people currently registered with UNRWA still awaited realization of their inalienable right to return, as well as fair compensation for their suffering and loss of property, as did millions more in the diaspora. A peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine depended on a resolution of the refugee

question, as did peace and stability of the region as a whole. Despite United Nations efforts and the resumption of the peace process in Annapolis the previous November, the plight of the refugees had yet to be alleviated. Israel persisted with its rhetoric, intransigence, and violation of international law and United Nations resolutions. It continued to refuse to acknowledge all responsibility for the refugee problem, despite having undertaken to obliterate the history of the Palestinians and their connection to the land by destroying more than 400 villages. It implemented a "law of return" permitting the immigration into Israel of any person of Jewish descent, while at the same time preventing the return of the Palestinians, as called for in Security Council resolution 237 (1967).

15. Through the years of conflict and displacement, UNRWA had remained a constant in the lives of the refugees. With vital support from Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and other donors, the Agency had continued to provide essential assistance to Palestine refugees and displaced Palestinians, helping to improve their socio-economic situation. It provided education, health and emergency relief and social services, as well as hope of a better future and some semblance, at least, of human dignity. Her delegation welcomed the Commissioner-General's articulation of the Agency's vision in paragraph 3 of her report (A/63/13). Indeed, the importance of the Agency's mandate should not be underestimated. Its services had helped sustain the refugees, while contributing to regional stability as a whole. The Agency's work in all fields of cooperation remained necessary, pending a just and lasting solution of the question.

16. In the Gaza Strip, the majority of the population were refugees, half of whom were children. The situation there remained severe owing to the persistence in 2008 of Israel's punitive and inhumane siege, as well as military assaults against civilians. Border crossings continued to be closed, with only sporadic openings, while the movement of persons and goods — including food, medicine, fuel and other basic supplies — continued to restricted, and electricity supplies cut. The humanitarian impact on Palestinians had been devastating — 80 per cent of civilians in Gaza were dependent on food aid for survival. Disease was on the rise, and chronic malnutrition and anaemia were prevalent among children in particular. Over 90 per cent of work places remained closed, and nearly 50 per cent of the workforce were unemployed. Meanwhile, health and sanitation systems and other infrastructure were falling into disrepair, with spare parts and building materials in short supply. Such collective punishment against the civilian population had continued even after the ceasefire reached in June. In the West Bank, Israel's imposition of hundreds of checkpoints, its unlawful construction of settlements and of the Wall, its intensification of the permit regime and its discriminatory road network continued to obstruct access to the Agency's services. The deliberately imposed humanitarian crisis in both Gaza and the West Bank was being further exacerbated by the global financial crisis.

17. The closures were affecting the mobility of UNRWA vehicles and staff, who continued to be attacked and harassed by Israeli forces. In May, an elementary school teacher working for the Agency in Khan Younis, Gaza, had been decapitated by an Israeli explosive in front of her three young children, who had then been confined alone in a room for at least five hours by Israeli soldiers. Further, Israel's obstruction of UNRWA assistance to refugees, its endangerment of UNRWA staff and facilities and its levying of taxes and transit charges on the Agency were unacceptable.

18. In the Nahr al-Barid camp in Lebanon, UNRWA continued its efforts to assist Palestine refugees affected by hostilities. However, the project remained underfunded and the Agency required further support to assist more than 30,000 persons in need of emergency food and shelter.

19. Palestine reiterated its deepest gratitude to UNRWA, all United Nations agencies and humanitarian organizations working together to assist the refugees. Her delegation urged the international community to continue its support for the Agency, particularly in light of increased financial pressures and needs, as well as its support for a just settlement of the question of Palestine in all its aspects.

20. *Mr. Argüello (Argentina) resumed the Chair.*

21. **Ms. Ziade** (Lebanon), speaking on behalf of the Arab Group, said that the report of the Commissioner-General reflected in statistics Israel's collective punishment of the Palestinian people. The economic blockade had destroyed Gaza's economy, rendered useless its health-care system and caused its infrastructure to collapse. In the West Bank, Israel had continued to expand its illegal separation wall in defiance of international law, crippling the economy,

paralysing livelihoods and diminishing prospects for a return to normal Palestinian life. Moreover, approximately 40 per cent of the West Bank was now taken up by settlements, outposts and military bases.

22. The Israeli military had forcibly entered UNRWA premises in the West Bank and Gaza in violation of Israel's obligations, under the 1946 Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations, to hold the premises of the United Nations inviolably. The Israeli authorities had also restricted, and continued to restrict, the movement of UNRWA personnel and had imposed cumbersome procedures for obtaining permits for local staff to enter Israel and East Jerusalem. To make matters worse, Israel, the occupying Power, had continued to impose a direct tax charge amounting to $132,524 and additional restrictions on Agency containers passing through Gaza crossings.

23. The Group condemned those Israeli practices and called on the community of nations to pressure Israel to allow UNRWA to carry out its mandate and to protect its staff members.

24. The plight of the Palestine refugees, which had lasted for more than 60 years, remained the principal question before the United Nations. It was incumbent on Members States to find a just and comprehensive solution to that question in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III). The inalienable right of the Palestine refugees to return to their home could not be diminished by the passage of time or by any changes in the situation on the ground.

25. Pledging support for the Agency's continuing efforts to fulfil its mandate, she said that the Group was deeply concerned that the deficit of $98.8 million in the General Fund, combined with increased expenditures for 2008, would limit the Agency's ability to plan on the basis of refugee needs or to enhance the quality of its services. While a number of Arab States had increased their contributions to UNRWA, she called on all Member States to ensure its financial security. The Group also called on UNRWA to continue to coordinate with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), relevant Palestinian institutions and host Arab countries.

26. Recalling that 2008 marked the sixtieth anniversary of the Nakbah and the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, she said that those events offered opportune moments to consider how international actors could do more to give meaning to human dignity for Palestine refugees and bring closer to realization the elusive goal of justice for Palestinians and a viable State of their own.

27. **Mr. Pires Pérez** (Cuba) said that for almost 60 years, UNRWA had been doing extraordinary work to alleviate the terrible living conditions of the Palestine refugees. The political, economic, social and humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, had been deteriorating tragically under Israel's brutal military occupation. The unilateral measures applied by Israel in the Territory were seriously threatening the prospects of achieving a negotiated two-State solution. Israel's incursions into Gaza and construction of the separation wall — a clear violation of international law — continued, as did the illegal settlement policy. The freedom of movement of persons and goods, especially in the Gaza Strip, had been severely restricted and had made prisoners of its inhabitants, despite repeated international appeals and successive United Nations resolutions. The level of poverty among Palestine refugees had risen by 30 per cent in the past year, and in the Gaza Strip 80 per cent of the inhabitants lived in extreme poverty. Extrajudicial executions, targeted assassinations, torture, arbitrary arrests, the destruction of homes, indiscriminate use of force, collective punishment and psychological terrorism were all features of Israel's presence in Palestine.

28. UNRWA was conducting its work under very difficult conditions. In violation of the Charter and of international treaties and agreements, the Israeli authorities were restricting the freedom of movement of the Agency's staff, goods and vehicles, undermining its work and causing it substantial financial loss; they were failing also to protect United Nations premises and the security of UNRWA staff.

29. The progress the Agency was making in its own organizational development was very encouraging. UNRWA should receive all the support and guarantees it needed.

30. Cuba would continue to support the struggle of the Palestinian people for its inalienable right to determine its own future and to establish an independent and sovereign State.

31. **Mr. Al-Bahi** (Sudan) said that Israeli practices in the Occupied Territory were increasing the suffering of the Palestinian people. Those practices also extended

to UNRWA staff members and restricted their ability to carry out their duties, in stark violation of international law. The events in the Nahr al-Barid refugee camp had further complicated the situation of the Palestine refugees, as had the Israeli aggression against Lebanon in 2006.

32. The suffering of the Palestinian people would not end until a just solution to the question of Palestine was found and the refugees were allowed to return to their homes in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III). The right of return was inalienable and an integral part of their right to self-determination and to establish an independent State, with Al-Quds al-Sharif as its capital.

33. His delegation supported the three-year management reform programme, which UNRWA had embarked on in 2006, designed to transform and modernize the main institutional components of the Agency. It also commended the Agency's efforts to ensure that its local employees received hazard pay, just like other United Nations employees.

34. **Mr. Taleb** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that, for the past 60 years, Israel had prevented the Palestine refugees from returning to their homes and it had brought in foreign settlers to occupy their lands, in blatant violation of international human rights law and United Nations resolutions. In his most recent report on the subject (A/63/326), the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel since 1967 declared that the continuous and deliberate violation by Israel of the Fourth Geneva Convention in its occupation of the Palestinian territory constituted an ongoing grave situation that called for a unified response by the international community.

35. The report also indicated that, thanks to the revival of the peace process at Annapolis and the existing truce, the situation for Israel has improved economically and politically, but the situation of the Palestinian people had worsened. The occupation authorities had expropriated more Palestinian land for the expansion of settlements, the crisis conditions had persisted in Gaza and restrictions on movement throughout the West Bank had been maintained or tightened. According to the Israeli non-governmental organization Peace Now, approximately 4,000 settler units had been built throughout the West Bank during the rule of former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, with one third of those settlements falling to the east of the illegal separation wall.

36. In respect of the situation in Gaza, the UNRWA report indicated that the territory remained in a state of isolation and perennial hardship. Severe fuel shortages resulting from the siege had paralysed public services, including sanitation and sewage treatment; that had had a direct bearing on public health. It should be noted that the Agency's Advisory Commission had reiterated the urgent need to remove restrictions relating to the movement of UNRWA staff and goods, in keeping with international law, the November 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access concluded between the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority and the 1967 Comay-Michelmore agreement between UNRWA and the Government of Israel.

37. His delegation noted that the Agency's report had included some positive indications, including the assistance provided by his own country, which would continue to treat the Palestine refugees on an equal footing with its own citizens. Stressing that the Palestine refugee problem was an international political and moral responsibility, he said that UNRWA should continue to operate in accordance with its mandate until that mandate had been fulfilled. In addition, the Agency should strive to broaden its donor base.

38. The Agency's mandate under General Assembly resolution 302 (IV) should be reaffirmed and Member States should respond to the Commissioner-General's urgent appeals. His delegation regretted that local staff members of UNRWA were the only United Nations personnel in the region who did not receive hazard pay.

39. **Mr. Al-Shamisi** (United Arab Emirates) said that the report gave a clear picture of the ever-worsening condition of the Palestinian people living inside the Occupied Territory. The Israeli occupation authorities had continued to commit a wide range of human rights violations, including wanton use of force, extrajudicial killing and collective punishment. The people of the Gaza Strip had been suffering greatly as a result of the Israeli economic blockade, which had deprived them of the necessities of life, including food, medicines and electricity. The occupation authorities had even threatened UNRWA staff and facilities and had restricted its ability to perform its mandate.

40. His delegation strongly condemned all Israeli violations and called upon the community of nations

and the Quartet to fulfil their moral, legal, political and humanitarian responsibilities towards the Palestinian people and to compel Israel to desist from its practices.

41. Recalling his country's unconditional pledge to continue its financial support for the Agency's programmes and activities, he called upon the community of nations and specialized economic and financial institutions, such as the World Bank, to increase their level of support in order to help UNRWA overcome its budget deficit. He also called upon donor States to fulfil their pledges to finance the reconstruction of the Nahr al-Barid refugee camp, pointed out that charitable institutions from his country had already financed the construction of temporary schools and hospitals.

42. The occupying Power must end its aggressions against and blockades of Palestinian refugee camps and cease obstructing the Agency's work and the movement of its staff. The Agency should pursue its mandate in all regions without discrimination; its personnel should receive the same privileges and immunities as other United Nations staff members, particularly with regard to hazard pay.

43. **Mr. Allaf** (Jordan) said that the refugee issue was central to the question of Palestine and a key point for the final-status negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis. It was of particular concern to his country, for Jordan was host to nearly 1.8 million Palestine refugees — 42 per cent of all those registered with UNRWA — and to 600,000 persons who had been displaced as a result of the 1967 war. In addition, Jordan bore full responsibility for three of the 13 refugee camps it hosted.

44. Protecting the rights and interests of the Palestine refugees had directly impacted Jordan. Despite the country's difficult financial circumstances, the Government had expended nearly $600 million on educational, health and social services for the refugees during 2007. The inability of UNRWA to keep up with growing needs in the camps, owing to its financial constraints and to population growth, had resulted in still further obligations for the Government. Jordan therefore reserved the right to be compensated for the true cost of having acted as host country for more than five decades.

45. The role of UNRWA would remain pivotal until a final solution that was satisfactory to all parties was fully implemented. Until then, Jordan called upon the donor community to increase contributions to the Agency and to make a serious effort to find a long-term solution to its chronic budget deficits. It was imperative, moreover, that the needs of Palestine refugees be dealt with equally, irrespective of their geographical locations or their living conditions.

46. Jordan shared the concern of the Agency's Advisory Commission over the separation wall, closures, and other restrictions imposed by the Israeli authorities in the West Bank and Gaza, which hampered access to employment, goods and basic services and restricted the ability of the Agency to transport staff and humanitarian assistance to those in need.

47. His delegation called upon the Agency to increase the budget of its Jordanian operations to a level commensurate with the needs of the refugees living in Jordan. The Agency should increase funding for hardship cases and redefine standards for determining such cases. Health centre staffing should be enhanced by the addition of specialist doctors and the problem of schools operating on a double-shift basis should be addressed by building more schools. UNRWA should also strive to close the gap between the level of basic services it provided and the level of service provided by the Jordanian State and to ensure that its services were available to refugees living outside the camps.

48. **Ms. Al-Sulaiti** (Qatar) said that, despite the untiring efforts of UNRWA, the condition of the Palestine refugees had deteriorated, particularly in the Occupied Territory. The severe decline in the Palestinian economy and the ever-increasing levels of unemployment and poverty, coupled with numerous other factors, had forced the Agency to make an emergency appeal for funds. However, it had received only 58 per cent of the amount it had requested. Her delegation therefore called upon all donors to provide the Agency with the funding it required to fulfil its mandate.

49. **Mr. Dizdar** (Turkey) said that his Government was heartened by the recent positive developments in the Middle East. The continuation of the bilateral contacts between Israel and the Palestinians, the relative calm on the borders of Israel, the movements on the Syrian-Israeli track and the agreement reached among the parties in Lebanon justified a certain amount of optimism, for the atmosphere in the region had improved over the previous year.

50. However, the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations must intensify, conditions on the ground in the West Bank must significantly improve and roadmap commitments, particularly on settlements, must be honoured. As long as just and lasting peace in the Middle East remained elusive, the suffering of the Palestine refugees, one of the most difficult aspects of the Middle East question, would not end. For 60 years the world had been witnessing their drama, in Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and elsewhere, and had watched their ever-deteriorating living conditions and declining means of livelihood.

51. Turkey commended UNRWA and its staff for their untiring efforts under difficult and often dangerous circumstances. It welcomed the ongoing institutional and organizational reform process within UNRWA. Turkey felt privileged to chair the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA. The continued funding gap and its effects on UNRWA services was a crucial issue, for UNRWA was a lifeline for thousands of Palestine refugees; the better it was equipped the better the prospects of the refugees. The international community must give the Agency more resources. Turkey itself had not only increased its annual voluntary contribution, which included assistance for the Nahr al-Barid camp, but had also responded to the various emergency appeals. In addition, it had pledged $150 million for the Palestine reform and development plan and was already working with the authorities in Palestine on that project. Turkey continued sponsoring also the "Industry for Peace" project in the context of the tripartite Ankara Forum bringing together private-sector representatives from Turkey, Palestine and Israel, which would eventually create important employment opportunities for the Palestinians and serve both Israel and Palestine as a confidence-building factor.

52. Turkey would continue to be a firm supporter of every effort to ease the plight of the Palestine refugees and to bring permanent peace to the Middle East.

53. **Mr. Hoang Chi Trung** (Viet Nam) observed that UNRWA had made tremendous efforts to discharge its important mandate, working under dire conditions over the past six decades. It had tirelessly provided health and social services to the dispossessed Palestinian refugees, but it was most noteworthy that it had enabled hundreds of thousands of Palestinian children to attend school, thus improving their lives. Its emergency assistance had offered some help in the worsening situation in Gaza.

54. Viet Nam supported the ongoing reform of UNRWA, and welcomed its decision to devise a medium-term strategy based on assessment of actual needs. The greatest challenge to UNRWA was its uncertain financial position. The Agency was working under a large deficit at a time when demands for assistance had sharply increased. The United Nations and Member States must give it stronger support, and the other agencies within the United Nations family should cooperate closely with it.

55. Another major obstacle to its work was the lack of cooperation from the Israeli Government and, in particular, the latter's closure and curfew policies, restrictions of movement in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the construction of the separation wall, all of which had hampered the circulation of UNRWA staff, vehicles and goods. His delegation stressed that the privileges and immunities of all United Nations staff must be fully respected and called upon the Israeli authorities to abolish their restrictive policies.

56. After 60 years, more serious efforts had to be made to resolve the conflict in the Middle East, including the Palestine refugee problem, in a just and lasting way.

57. **Ms. Spoljaric** (Switzerland) hailed the commitment of UNRWA and its staff, who were working in a singularly restrictive and sometimes dangerous environment. The Agency's improved documentation on financial, strategic and programme planning should be accompanied, in the field and organizationally, by better programme monitoring and evaluation. The interim results of the Agency's management reform were encouraging.

58. She expressed particular concern at the steady deterioration of the social, economic and security situation prevailing throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory. In recent months UNRWA personnel's access to the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, had been restricted, preventing them from responding adequately to the needs of the refugees. They were also forcing them to take administrative obstacles and security risks, all of which hampered their work. All parties concerned should respect their obligations and give UNRWA staff unimpeded access to the Palestine refugees.

59. Donor countries should contribute to the general budget of the Agency in addition to supporting specific projects. That applied also to the host countries, which had already shown generosity to their refugee Palestinian populations. Switzerland planned to continue being a reliable partner of UNRWA at all levels. It would be flexible in making additional specific contributions to projects that sought to improve living conditions, such as the reconstruction of the Nahr al-Barid camp in Lebanon.

60. Her Government would work with UNRWA as it prepared to mark the sixtieth anniversary of its establishment. The occasion would certainly not be a festive one, as it reflected on the United Nations inability to resolve the issue. However, it would be an opportunity for the international community to reaffirm its support for efforts to improve the Palestine refugees' living conditions and to recall the urgency of arriving at a just and lasting solution of the Israeli-Arab conflict.

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.